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TITLE

Exploring Flexible Work Arrangements in Relation to the Notion of the 'Ideal Worker': A Case Study in a Maltese ICT Organisation

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this qualitative study, which is set in a Maltese ICT organisation, is to explore the attitudes of senior management towards flexible work arrangements (FWAs) and how these are applied in the case study organisation. The study uses the gendered lens to examine issue related to FWAs and builds on Acker's Theory of Gendered Organisations (Acker, 1990).

METHODOLOGY

An interpretivist approach was adopted to carry out the research, which is based on eight one-to-one, in-depth interviews with male informants, who are at senior management level positions. The themes emerging from the interviews were analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and were compared to the framework of Adaptability of Work Arrangements (Gareis & Korte, 2002).

Key Findings

The research shows that the managers' attitudes towards FWAs vary and this is reflected in the different ways that FWAs are practised in the studied Maltese ICT organisation. Such differences are related to the managers'

perceptions, values and past experiences in managing work on flexible schedules. In the studied context, the higher ranked employees at senior management level had less access to FWAs, and because of the sensitivity and nature of certain ICT jobs, not all workers could make use of telework. Furthermore, due to inherited organisational culture, FWAs were generally associated with mothers who have a family and caring commitments. Ultimately, this creates a glass ceiling, which hinders women with caring responsibilities who use FWAs, from occupying top management positions in the organisation.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings that emerged from this research study correspond to the arguments presented in the Theory of Gendered Organisations (Acker, 1990). This theory claims that organisations are not gender neutral and are still built around the notion of the unencumbered male worker and masculine norms which reward those who devote their time exclusively to paid work without resorting to FWAs. Essentially, this happens because of gendered values trickling down from society at large, which directly and indirectly shape the assumptions that are adopted in organisations.

The research suggests that as long as family and care responsibilities continue to be associated primarily with women, gender inequality in organisations is likely to prevail (Williams, 2000) thus reinforcing Acker's (1990) notion of the ideal worker.

References

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